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Sensorial Art Perceiving the world as ' e-motion'

Throughout my career as a dancer and choreographer I have been fascinated by the power of dance to generate a special quality of emotional states purely from physical motion. These 'emotional states' fascinate me in the sense that they seem to be disassociated from any specific relation to psychological motives, and seem to be merely related to the sensation of moving. They breathe a raw, pure quality and are not related towards the self but embodied by a universal nature.

Departing with the question: 'what makes the pure experience of movement become an emotional state', during my Master's Course at the Dance Unlimited ArtEZ University¹, I initiated

¹ The Choreographic Master Course at the Dance Unlimited ArtEZ University Arnhem (NL) is distinguished for its pioneer vision in 'Open Form Composition' and for offering a new-flanged program that integrates the development of coherent artistic vision and philosophical background within a choreographic research practice. For more info please see: www.danceunlimited.nl.



an artistic research that investigates the nature of the emotional state emerging from dance by exploring the sensorial consciousness of motion.

Challenging tacit artistic knowledge

To investigate what is the nature of dance movement that generates an emotional state, I considered it necessary to research, on one hand, how dancers/choreographers perceive the body in motion while dancing and what is the special knowledge that dance can give in relation to the experience of movement, on the other hand I needed to understand emotion in a scientific gist. Therefore I based my research on an experiential methodology that explored the sensorial conscience of the body gained with the practice of dance in inter-relation with scientific knowledge from recent studies in neuroscience. More specifically I've structured the research on two main practices:

- a) Choreographic research works where I explored the intense practice of pure physical concepts like, falling, sliding, bumping, opening and so on, to analyze what sort of emotional states they would generate and how the dancers experience their own bodies while dancing;
- b) Confronting and correlating the empirical knowledge resulting from the choreographic research with scientific and philosophic literature, particularly with the work of the neurologist António Damásio on the physiologic processes that generate emotion and feelings and with the concept of "a body of affection" as portrayed by the contemporary Philosopher José Gil.

The results

To be able to give a brief explanation of the results of my research thesis I will present here four main lines of thought that correlate in a final reflection.

1) A somatic approach to emotion

The feeling of an emotion generated with the pure movement of dance finds substantiation on a somatic approach of emotion, which claims that emotion is generated from bodily responses rather than judgments. This approach was originally defended by James-Lange theory of emotion (1884) and is currently being studied in great depth by neuroscience. According to the neuroscientist António Damásio (2000) emotions are complicated collections of chemical and neural responses to internal or external stimuli causing bodily changes in order to regulate the homeostatic balance of an organism'.

2) Unfolding the experience of dancing through the perception of the special corporal consciousness that it discloses

Dancing and performing dance, being experienced on a metaphysical threshold, has always been a delicate subject to describe. Nevertheless, such a task became central to this research. Here I present it as ' Moments of dance'. This description is based on my practice as a professional contemporary dancer for 10 years and is echoed by the testimonials of other dancers.



Moments of dance

Through dance there are moments when I become motion. In these moments, I'm not in motion, but I am motion. I experience an ongoing state of transformation; not a transformation into something, but a feeling of 'being' transformation; a state of becoming or being the force of becoming; being simply a manifestation of energy.

Dancing plays with the vertigo of the momentum of becoming. It perceives existence as a motion state, a state of 'trans-formation'.

In moments of dance I find myself in a state of vibration: as if the pulsations of my atoms, cells or organs become amplified; I sense my body as a cloud of trembling particles, echoing into a choreography of innumerable vibrations of micro-motions.

As my body moves my perception rests in the sensation of an ever-forming cloud of energy. I dive into the physical consciousness of the sensation of movement so I sense my self as a physical quality, a force, an energetic manifestation.

In these moments, my body breathes a permeable quality, and in its vulnerable state gathers a visceral sensual power.

3) A view on the particular mode by which dance enhances the proprioceptive sense

The practice of dance leads to a strong enhancement of the sense of movement called kinesthetic or proprioceptive sense. This sense 'is a distinct sensory modality that provides feedback on the status of the body internally (...) it is often unnoticed because humans will adapt to a continuously present stimulus; this is called habituation, desensitization'².

Although in a performance situation the dancer has gained a formal and muscular habituation to the movement, differently from other physical practices, dance's purpose is the experience of movement itself. Therefore, this habituation doesn't lead consciousness towards desensitization, but towards an intensification of the kinesthetic sense. Consequently in 'Moments of dance' this capacity of habituation leads consciousness to dive into an extra level of consciousness of motion, a deeper sensory layer where the impressions of micro-motions become alive. The consciousness of movement dives into a micro level of perception.

4) A personal deliberation on the experience of transformation

Since the day I was conceived, I have been in constant transformation. Every moment I relate to what seems exterior and transform from this process of interaction. From this transformation process I conceive time. Transformation generates happening, it creates the perception of before and after and therefore gives meaning to time. Time exists as a relation to a transformation process. Inevitably each day I exist I become older. My body needs to transform to continue its living motion, to continue its time travel.

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinesthesia> (accessed on 20/05/08)



Transformation happens from a constant energetic interaction between the interior and exterior of an entity (as the breathing or feeding process), through a continuous IN/OUT motion- absorbing and expelling energy. So, any living unit survives through a process of affecting and being affected by the world. Inspired on José Gil's (1980) reference to the body as a focus of living energy, which in its own materiality contains strong affective powers: respect, love, desire, and fear; I name 'Forces of affection' to the forces between two identities that generate this interactive motion process.

Final reflection - how emotion becomes revealed through the experience of a sensorial consciousness of motion

As we have seen, a living organism survives through a continuous process of transformation generated by constant corporal changes. Hence, by conceiving emotion as responses to the environment that cause bodily changes in order to survive, I can infer that one is intrinsically a constant emotional being. However, the constant bodily process of transformation is so inherent to a living being, so incorporated in the body, that the consciousness of this state becomes concealed in the intimacy of the flesh. One gains an habituation to the somatic perception of the micro-motions of transformation, and becomes desensitized from the feeling of these constant changes.

Through practice of dance, as the practice of the sensorial perception of bodily movements, one becomes more sensitive to the corporal process of continuous transformation. The dancer senses the vibrating micro-motions of energy and gains a somatic conscious of himself as a manifestation of energy in a constant state of transformation. Dance digs into a tacit bodily knowledge to awaken a latent somatic perception of its micro-motions as the constant emotions or bodily changes inherent to a basic living condition.

In other words, in 'Moments of Dance' emotion is felt at an elemental level, as a dance of micro-motions in an innate struggle of survival. Or, using a more scientific form of expression, dance can disclose a somatic perception of emotion as the continuous bodily changes that maintain its homeostatic balance and therefore as the base of the survival transformation process.

Conclusion- brief overview of the concept of 'Sensorial Art'

Based on this research I became convinced that to disclose the metaphysical experience of dance can be of great importance, in the way that it can offer a unique empirical knowledge coming from an intense perception of the body in movement that has no parallel in other disciplines.

The intense perception of the corporal micro-motions revealed in dance can provide a experiential complicity to the theory of emotion from Professor António Damásio (1994, 2000, 2003). Furthermore it can also offer a very rich perception of reality as a transformative motion process. Such a vision can offer a strong contribution to many scientific, sociologic and philosophical fields.

Within my own artistic work this research lead me to the creation of an artistic theory that I call '*Sensorial art- moving through the vertigo of affection*' and to the foundation of the concept 'Reversal Thinking -a somatic approach to the process of thinking.



'Sensorial Art' investigates the perception of reality as a continuous motion process happening in between the tension of temporary, formal dualities. Inspired on the notion of 'the naked image' from José Gil (1996), 'Sensorial Art' explores the experience of reality through a 'naked perception': like a baby, the world is absorbed through a constant sensorial involvement, so the perception of reality doesn't become formalized in static pre-defined forms of identification, but by practicing a continuous flow of sensorial awareness, the gist of reality gains a motion quality. Therefore, by dimming down a pre-formalized recognition of reality and dimming up a sensorial relation, reality becomes perceived as a continuous motion process; it gains the quality of a continuous travelling in the momentum, driven by the ongoing consciousness of sensorial compositions. 'Sensorial Art' undresses meaning from a formal/static conception to comprehend meaning through the interactive motion process generated by the energetic forces between two identities, which I call "Forces of affection".

Based on the idea of 'Reversal Thinking', in the continuation of my MA research, I've been developing a choreographic methodology that investigates how can the sensorial somatic knowledge acquired by the dancer enhances a somatic approach to the process of thinking. Furthermore I aim to explore how the ideas and practices developed within this creative methodology can contribute to other fields of thought and other artistic/sociologic practices.

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